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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the relationship between the press and professional wrestling. It examines professional wrestling as a business and the conflicting goals of the promoters and the press. The paper focuses on how the press covered the most widely viewed professional wrestling show of all time, WrestleMania III (looking at newspaper coverage during the four weeks prior to and three days after the presentation--March 1 to April 1, 1987), and why the press covered the event the way it did. The paper also examines the media-related strategies that made WrestleMania III an important event in terms of public acceptance and media attention. Seventy-seven notes are included. (SR)

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THE PRESS VS. PROFESSIONAL WRESTLING:

HOW THE PRESS COVERED WRESTLEMANIA III

by

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In 1987, an event that established a new record for attracting the biggest indoor crowd in history was headlined by people who had been connected with both rock music and athletics. Yet it was neither a rock music concert nor a confrontation between outstanding athletes. The event was WrestleMania III, a professional wrestling show at the Pontiac (Mich.) Silverdome in greater Detroit on March 29. The indoor crowd of 93,173 was--at the time--the largest ever, grossing more than \$16 million in paid attendance, closed circuit and pay-per-view telecasts.¹ What they came to see was the main event--World Wrestling Federation champion Hulk Hogan's successful title defense against Andre the Giant.

Despite the record audience, the national media gave WrestleMania III little more than token recognition. This was perhaps due in part to the tightly controlled maneuvering of the promoter that discouraged extensive curiosity about the wrestlers. The promoter--the World Wrestling Federation--shunned a traditional, all-out publicity campaign in favor of a carefully designed effort that depended more on in-house print and television hype than on publicity originating from the outside media. Most of the press, which was provided with WWF press guides and handouts, did little to provide its readers with in-depth, accurate or behind-the-scenes information. It either relied on the WWF releases or ignored the event altogether.

The newspapers that did allocate space to WrestleMania III were inconsistent in their approaches to covering the event. The differences reflected journalists' attitudes toward pro wrestling in general and WrestleMania III in particular. The reporters who wrote most of the stories exhibited indifference, ignorance and inaccuracies.

The press appeared to have difficulty in handling the event, which was partly attributable to journalists' lack of familiarity with professional wrestling. In promoting WrestleMania III, the World Wrestling Federation defined its product as "sports entertainment" and went no further to delineate where the line between sport and entertainment was drawn.² Perhaps "athletic entertainment" would be more precise, since many sportswriters refuse to bestow the title of "sport" on contests where the outcomes are prearranged.

Whether professional wrestling should be regarded as a sport is an issue that is yet to be resolved. This situation poses a decision for sports editors who must decide if their departments should bear the responsibility of providing coverage. In Japan, where all forms of wrestling are very popular, pro wrestling is given prominent coverage in its sports pages.³ In the United States, this is not the case. Pro wrestling news in this country is apt to be relegated to the entertainment section or not published at all. Yet, most American wrestling fans agree that it is indeed a sport.⁴

The entertainment that pro wrestling provides its fans is a combination of athletics, acrobatics, choreography, social commentary, melodrama, comedy and, most of all, vigorous promotion. This multiplicity of attributes makes it difficult to assess its mass appeal. Semiologist Roland Barthes has described it as a "spectacle of excess," tragic drama in which the performers convey explicit signs to an audience seeking emotional experiences associated with the concepts of suffering, defeat and justice.⁵ Popular culture critic Arthur Asa Berger perceives professional wrestling in a context of political symbolism, viewing the matches as confrontations

among the forces of authority (the referee), evil in society (the honorable wrestler) and good in society (the rulebreaking wrestler).⁶ Sociologists Brendan Maguire and John Wozniak further suggest that wrestling's appeal lies in the obtrusive use of racial and ethnic stereotypes.⁷

Whatever its appeal, promoters of professional wrestling go to great lengths to satisfy the audience. Each match is planned, or "booked," by an employee of the promotion known as the booker. The events that occur inside the ring are determined by the individual skills of the wrestlers, the effect on future box office receipts and the desires of the audience. For dramatic effect, the promotion's booker will assign the wrestlers a ring persona, with a view toward matching conflicting characters against each other. For example, the National Wrestling Alliance promotion created "the Russian Nightmare" Nikita Koloff to compete against "the American Dream" Dusty Rhodes. A wrestler who demonstrates outstanding athletic ability will often be assigned to carry a less gifted opponent for a presentable match.

And a number of wrestlers, known as "jobbers," specialize at making other wrestlers look good by losing convincingly--perennially doing "jobs" without ever winning a match.⁸ The success of a professional wrestler thus depends on his ability to draw and sustain an audience, to exhibit athletic prowess and to develop his ring persona. The ability to absorb physical punishment, the willingness to risk injury and the demands of performing several days and nights a week on a busy travel schedule attest to the wrestlers' status as athletes, even if their activity is not conceded to be sport. The complexity that underlies what is overtly a very simple form of entertainment may account for why few of the journalists who covered WrestleMania III had more than a superficial understanding of the event.

A typical approach was described by Michael Frezell, assistant city editor of the Windsor Star: "We considered it as a news event--more of a news feature. We thought, 'Let's do a story on the crowd--like at the Super Bowl.'"⁹

The Star assigned the story to reporter Al Halberstadt, who had no previous experience with pro wrestling aside from watching it on television.

"Wrestling had been ignored in the past because of its obvious phoniness," Halberstadt said. "It wasn't seen as a sport by the sports department or as entertainment by the entertainment department. But I thought it was getting too popular to ignore, so I talked to our sports editor."¹⁰

When WrestleMania III attracted more than 93,000 spectators, the issue of "phoniness" began to lose its significance, and journalists--many for the first time in their careers--were assigned to the pro wrestling matches.

The resultant newspaper coverage indicates that more than a few journalists had openly negative attitudes toward the assignment. These attitudes may have been based on unfavorable preconceptions about pro wrestling and pro wrestling fans. In a Pro Wrestling Digest editorial on the subject of negative attitudes among the media, J. D. McKay Jr. described the relationship between pro wrestling and a hypothetical, hostile member of the press:

Why this columnist insults us is understandable. . . . People frequently criticize what they do not understand. This journalist attacks pro wrestling because it is something he has never learned much about and possibly never will due to the secrecy that surrounds the business. Even if he did, he may still not understand its appeal.

But then he steps away from the sport and insults and slanders its fans . . . overstepping his bounds.

We are not "suckers" who believe wrestling is legitimate. .

. . . We know it [is] showmanship and it is predetermined and contrived as is the case with any form of entertainment . . . but we still pay our money because our open-mindedness allows us to enjoy and appreciate wrestling for what it is.

In most of their reporting, however, journalists expressed a condescending attitude of detached amusement. The stories show that reporters did their best to get into the spirit of the crowd at WrestleMania III, which perhaps was the main story after all.

This paper looks at the relationship that exists between the press and professional wrestling. It examines the pro wrestling business and the conflicting goals of the promoters and the press. The paper takes a close look at how the press covered the most widely viewed pro wrestling show of all time, WrestleMania III, during the time frame of four weeks prior to and three days after the presentation--March 1 to April 1, 1987. It also examines the media-related strategies that made WrestleMania III an important event in terms of public acceptance and media attention. And it attempts to answer the following questions: Who covered WrestleMania III? Was it covered by sportswriters, feature writers, columnists? What did they report--and how did they choose to present it? How much research was done to supplement the journalists' lack of familiarity with pro wrestling? How accurate were the reports? How much concern was there for the truth and the commitment to fully inform the public? In summary, why did they cover WrestleMania III the way they did?

The Making of a Record-Breaking Event

WrestleMania III was the third annual extravaganza presented by the World Wrestling Federation, a subsidiary of Titan Sports, Inc. The first WrestleMania occurred in 1985 at New York City's Madison Square Garden

before an audience of 24,000 spectators. The second WrestleMania took place in three venues--metropolitan New York, Chicago and Los Angeles--with closed circuit telecasts that provided the full program at each site for the combined audience of 46,500 fans. Hulk Hogan was a triumphant champion in both earlier WrestleMania programs, but in neither case had he faced the challenge of the man who was his predecessor as pro wrestling's major box office attraction--Andre the Giant.

WrestleMania III drew a record indoor audience, of which more than 90,000 were paid admissions, to the Pontiac Silverdome. The event grossed in excess of \$16 million, including a record pay-per-view TV audience of approximately 520,000. Worldwide interest in WrestleMania III was demonstrated by live and tape-delayed broadcasts of the event to twenty-eight foreign countries. A videocassette recording also was marketed in the weeks following the event.

The attendance at WrestleMania III surpassed the 87,500 who filled the New Orleans Superdome on December 5, 1981, for a rock music concert by the Rolling Stones. The attendance figure also exceeded the 81,270 football fans at Super Bowl XVI, which was played at the Silverdome on January 24, 1982. Although Super Bowl XVI sold out, the space requirements of the football playing field consumed part of the arena's seating area that was available for WrestleMania III. The previous record for professional wrestling was a WWF program in Toronto that drew 70,673 to the Canadian National Exhibition Stadium six weeks prior to WrestleMania III on February 14, 1987.

In other existing sports-related indoor records, 67,596 basketball fans were on hand to see the U.S. Olympic Team All-Stars take on the NBA

All-Stars at the Indianapolis Hoosierdome in 1984. In boxing, the prevailing record was set by 63,630 persons who attended the Muhammad Ali vs. Leon Spinks match at the Superdome in 1978. For major league baseball, the indoor record of 58,905 was established at the Seattle Kingdome for the 1985 All-Star Game.

The main event at WrestleMania III was for the WWF world heavyweight title between defending champion Hulk Hogan and challenger Andre the Giant. Hogan had been the WWF champion since 1984 and Andre the Giant had one of the best win-loss records in professional wrestling. More important, each was an imposing visual specimen. Hogan had the muscular physique that attested to his weightlifting training, and Andre's imposing size justified his billing as a giant. In recent years, both men had maintained pro wrestling personas as clean wrestlers who obeyed the rules. They were presented to the public as authentic athletic heroes who served as role models for young fans. In sum, each portrayed the image of a consummate fan favorite, a role called "babyface" in the pro trade. Andre had never been a champion--his popularity was such that it had been considered wiser to protect him from overexposure within the limited boundaries of the promotion by leasing him to other promotions for guest appearances.¹² But with the expansion of the WWF from a regional promotion to a national enterprise, Andre now worked the WWF full time.

Since professional wrestling combines elements of sport and entertainment, a dramatic scenario was constructed to add to the appeal of the historic match that served as WrestleMania III's main event. During the weeks preceding their match, Hogan and Andre received trophies for their accomplishments. The presentations were shown extensively on the WWF's

group of syndicated and cable television programs. Andre displayed jealousy and anger because Hogan received a bigger trophy despite his shorter career. Thus, Andre discarded his babyface persona and turned into a wrestling villain, a role described in the trade as that of a "heel." In pro wrestling, babyfaces seldom combat each other, but the new set of circumstances permitted Andre the heel to challenge Hogan the babyface. The feud was further developed in a "battle royal" shown on the NBC network on the March 14 airing of "Saturday Night's Main Event." Unlike a regular match, where the ostensible goal is to pin the adversary's shoulders to the mat for three consecutive seconds, a battle royal entails a large number of wrestlers who enter the ring together with the objective of forcing one another out of the ring. The last surviving wrestler in the ring is declared the winner. In the battle royal, which had been taped at a recent WWF program in Detroit, Hogan and Andre exhibited their vulnerability by not winning the non-title contest. But they simultaneously added to their credibility by requiring extraordinary effort from the other wrestlers to eliminate the pair. In Andre's case, it required the united strength of eight brawny wrestlers to put him out of the ring.

The WWF secured the Pontiac Silverdome with the specific intention of breaking the indoor attendance record and establishing pro wrestling as a mainstream form of sports entertainment. In WrestleMania III, Titan Sports owner and booker Vince McMahon Jr. hoped to fill the Silverdome by offering the public what promised to be the most spectacular confrontation since David defeated Goliath: a title match between Hogan and Andre.

In addition to the main event, WrestleMania III had an undercard of eleven other matches, including a contest for the second-line WWF

intercontinental title that was subsequently named "best match of the year" in many polls.¹³ A supporting cast of celebrities was recruited to increase WrestleMania III's status as an event that transcended the spectacle of a typical pro wrestling card. Singer Aretha Franklin, a Detroit native, opened the program with her rendition of "America the Beautiful." Mary Hart, host of the "Entertainment Tonight" television series, served as guest timekeeper. Singer Alice Cooper seconded a wrestler in a preliminary match. Television comedian and former baseball player Bob Uecker also served as guest ring announcer.

The WWF held press conferences and distributed news releases during the two months preceding the event. Interviews with the wrestlers and press credentials were provided on a limited basis. The WrestleMania III press kit included copies of the WWF Magazine and the WrestleMania III official program. The kits also provided fact sheets about the WWF, the audience, the wrestlers and guest celebrities, the telecommunications equipment used for the event and the availability of taped highlights for newscasts.

In a telephone conversation with WWF media coordinator Michael Weber at the promotion's Stamford, Connecticut, headquarters, he commented on the WWF's strategy for WrestleMania III.

"We answer the phone when somebody calls," he said. "We don't pitch stories. We almost operate under the angle that no news is good news.

"We sold tickets through national TV and an "800" telephone number. . . . We sold out eight days in advance."¹⁴

Publisher David Meltzer of the Wrestling Observer Newsletter said the WWF accomplished "the most brilliant job of hyping a wrestling match I'd ever seen." He noted that it appeared Titan Sports had taken a big gamble

in renting a stadium as large as the Silverdome. As for the WWF's reticent media policy, Meltzer said, "Titan is scared of the truth. The less the public knows, the more it can lie. The press kit for WrestleMania III was the biggest collection of lies I ever saw."¹⁵

The practice of distorting the truth, a criticism frequently aimed at public relations in general, is a common occurrence in the promotion of professional wrestling. Pro Wrestling Digest writer Jeff Steele stated the utilization of such methods is part of the business: "Every punch, every word, every bit of it is a lie. . . . It's wrestling pro style. If you don't like it, the Olympics are coming up."¹⁶

If most of the patrons who came to the Silverdome for WrestleMania III were unaware that they were victims of excessive hype, the same could be said of the press. In both instances, it appeared not to matter. For the most part, they were having too much fun to really care.

The Main Event Participants: Hogan and Andre

The main event at WrestleMania III was the match between Hogan and Andre, two pro wrestling stars who owed their popularity to the promotion's creative and judicious use of the media.

Hulk Hogan was born Terry Gene Bollea on August 11, 1953, in Augusta, Georgia, and spent his youth in Tampa, Florida. In Who's Who in Pro Wrestling, a directory in which the wrestlers do not write their own listings, publisher Dave Meltzer says Hogan is six feet five inches tall and weighs 290 pounds.¹⁷ The WWF lists him as three inches taller and four pounds heavier.¹⁸ The 1986 Who's Who report describes him as a nine-year veteran of the ring who is the "hottest-drawing wrestling attraction of

all-time." Effectively, marketed as a wrestling rock star, Hogan became a national celebrity during mid-1985. He originally wrestled under the names Terry Boulder and Sterling Golden, performing mainly in the South with a heel persona. In 1979, he made his first tour with the World Wide Wrestling Federation (the "Wide" was subsequently dropped from the name) and was dubbed "The Incredible Hulk Hogan" by WWWF promoter Vince McMahon Sr. Hogan attracted attention among wrestling fans when he "bodyslammed" Andre the Giant on a televised WWWF program, and Hogan vs. Andre matches headlined cards throughout the WWWF's regional base in the Northeast and cities such as Atlanta, Los Angeles and Toronto. He also had a small part in the film "Rocky III," where he played the role of Thunderlips, Rocky's opponent in a boxer vs. wrestler gimmick match.

Meltzer's Who's Who adds that many of Hogan's wrestling colleagues are "downright disdainful of his lack of an athletic background and lack of stamina . . . an example of what steroids, bleach for the hair and sudden tan lotion will do."¹⁹ A biographical story in Pro Wrestling Illustrated also noted that Hogan was a rock music guitarist and bodybuilder who entered the pro ranks without the benefit of amateur wrestling experience.²⁰

Hogan's initial success as a champion pro wrestler occurred by accident in 1983 when he violated the script by unintentionally knocking out Antonio Inoki to win a world championship tournament in Japan.²¹ He became World Wrestling Federation champion in a match at Madison Square Garden on January 23, 1984.

Although adored by his young fans as well as casual wrestling fans, Hogan is not highly regarded by the pro wrestling purists, who decry Hogan's lack of agility, technical moves or the ability to perform more than a few

minutes without the aid of extended periods of boring restholds. In the 1986 and 1987 Wrestling Observer Newsletter annual polls of experts, neither Hogan nor Andre made the list of the world's 75 best pro wrestlers.²²

As for Hogan's competitor, Andre the Giant was born Andre Rousimoff on May 19, 1946, in Grenoble, France. The WWF lists his height at seven feet four inches.²³ In Who's Who, however, Meltzer states that Andre is six feet ten inches tall and weighs 520 pounds. Andre's listing also notes that he suffers from acromegaly, a disease that causes an oversecretion of growth hormones responsible for his unusually large head, hands and feet. The biographical sketch says that during his twenty-two years as a pro wrestler, Andre had been one of wrestling's most successful box office attractions, though his career has tapered off since injuring an ankle during a 1981 match.

Meltzer's Who's Who also said of Andre's career:

His earnings were in the \$400,000 range annually during the mid-70's. . . . Sometimes billed as undefeated, but has dropped matches during his career to Antonio Inoki, Seiji Sakaguchi, Andy Robins, El Canek, The Sheik, Don Leo Jonathan, Killer Kowalski, Kimala, Jerry Lawler, Shozo Kobayashi and Karl Kotch . . . Andre's legendary fondness for alcohol caused his weight to balloon past 500 pounds (he was a well-conditioned 330-385 during his peak years where he was billed as 7-5, 425 pounds). . . . Andre's genuine wrestling skills were always limited. But he was fairly competent during his peak. . . . He is among the poorest active performers. . . . He almost always wrestled as a babyface in North America, but has always been a heel in Japan.²⁴

The reference to alcohol is substantiated by a story about Andre that appeared in Sports Illustrated in 1983. According to writer Terry Todd, "During the week or so that I was with him, his average daily consumption was a case of beer . . . two bottles of wine . . . six or eight shots of brandy . . . half a dozen standard mixed drinks, such as Bloody Marys or

Screwdrivers, and the odd glass of Pernod."²⁵

Andre entered the match under the alleged direction of manager Bobby "The Brain" Heenan. In pro wrestling, "managers" are used to add to the intensity of excitement among the audience. They usually manage heels, and facilitate rulebreaking by passing their wrestlers illegal weapons or distracting the referee during the matches. In their book, Wrestling to Rasslin', Gerald W. Morton and George M. O'Brien explain, "Managers always get involved in the action, just enough to make sure that the villains they manage will win, but never . . . enough to risk their own safety. . . . They are leeches who live off the blood and sweat of others. They are, therefore, contemptible creatures."²⁶

For inarticulate wrestlers such as Andre, a manager serves the additional function of doing most of the talking du. And in the service of a short-winded performer, managers create diversions that distract the audience's attention while the wrestler catches his breath in an extended resthold.

In the role of Andre's manager, Heenan's glib patter helped to build the hype for WrestleMania III. But he did not risk taking the spotlight away from the two main participants by interfering during the championship match.

The Detroit Dailies

The city of Detroit has two major daily newspapers that serve its more than 1,200,000 residents: the Detroit Free Press and The Detroit News.²⁷ Both newspapers gave Wrestlemania III considerable but dissimilar coverage.

The Detroit Free Press published a daily feature, "Countdown to

WrestleMania III," on the front page of its feature section beginning Monday, March 22. The Free Press commenced its coverage of WrestleMania III, however, with a story by Neal Rubin on March 4 issue's "second front page." Rubin said, "More than 62,000 tickets have been sold. . . . Ringside seats, at \$100 apiece, are gone." He also noted that Pontiac Mayor Walter Moore presented the WWF with a welcoming proclamation and "sat at the head table, gazing out at a gathering no bigger than what might be expected for the pope." In addition, Rubin expressed skepticism over the WWF's claim that Andre the Giant was seven feet four. "He's close enough, however, that it really doesn't matter," he wrote.²⁸

On March 16, the WWF ran an advertisement in the Free Press' sports section. The following day, the Free Press printed a story on the front page of its feature section, "the way we live." The story by reporter Terry Foster stated pro wrestling was "staged."²⁹ One week later, the Free Press' "Countdown" feature was a story by Rubin exposing more about the business.³⁰

On March 25, the front page of the Free Press featured a teaser box to draw attention to an inside story by reporter Rubin about WWF champion Hogan. The story took thirty-one column inches of space in the newspaper's "way we live" section, not including the 153-point headline and 23.5 column inches given to photographs of Hulk Hogan.

In his story, Rubin indicated he was frustrated by the WWF's policy of minimum disclosure.

"The WWF reveals nothing of Hogan's background and won't arrange interviews if the past will be a subject," he wrote. "Says [WWF media coordinator] Weber: 'The mystery of Hulk Hogan is what makes him him.'"

In fulfilling his role as a journalist, Rubin tried to circumvent WWF

secrecy by interviewing people in Hogan's home state of Florida. Through long-distance telephone calls, he succeeded in obtaining quotations from people who knew Hogan as a youth. The story told how then Terry Bollea played little league baseball but not football because "his mom didn't want him to get hurt." In his junior year in high school, Bollea allegedly gave the public its first good look at his athletic body by "streaking" naked at the high school graduation ceremony. While working as a musician at a Florida tavern, Bollea was approached by pro wrestlers who came to hear his rock band. When Bollea mentioned that he aspired to be a pro wrestler, he was placed in a strenuous training program until pronounced ready for his first professional match.

Bollea's debut finally came in a high school gym in Fort Pierce, Fla., before maybe 1,500 people. Bollea, billed as Sterling Golden, wasn't even advertised on the card. He had no robe, no T-shirt, just a towel around his neck.

"All of a sudden here comes this big creature and there's just dead silence," says [WWF associate local promoter and former wrestler] Jerry Brisco, relishing the memory. "By the time he got through the crowd into the ring, they were giving him a standing ovation. He went out, stumbled around for a while -- he was still real raw -- and got the pin. People rushed the ring like nothing I've ever seen for a newcomer. It gave you goose bumps."

Still a bachelor, Hogan doesn't drink or smoke. He wears a large crucifix -- incensed when Andre the Giant hurled it to the ground, Hogan accepted the challenge that became the main event at WrestleMania III -- and says he has God in his corner.³¹

Coincidentally, the headline to the article below Rubin's Hulk Hogan story read, "Fans, critics talk of the fall of Jim Bakker."³²

Although Rubin may have circumvented the WWF's main office, his story nevertheless relied in part on WWF-connected sources. Wrestling Observer Newsletter publisher Meltzer confirmed that, according to the Hogan legend, the erstwhile musician and bouncer got into a bar brawl with Jerry Brisco's brother, former national collegiate and National Wrestling Alliance world

heavyweight champion Jack Brisco. The Briscos were impressed and brought the future Hogan to trainer-promoter Hiro Matsuda. Meltzer added that Hogan is definitely not a bachelor.³³

On March 26, the Free Press published a front-page Wrestlemania III update by staff reporter Dawson Bell. The story quoted a Pontiac police captain who compared the wrestling card with the impending visit by Pope John Paul II.³⁴

On the 27th, Terry Foster had the assignment of analyzing the complete WrestleMania III card. Foster's story, nearly a half-page in length, was one of four stories devoted to the event in the issue's "weekend" section. It was accompanied by a color drawing of Hogan and Andre by Dick Mayer that measured about ten by fourteen inches.³⁵

On the day of the event, the Free Press' "Countdown" series offered a story by Suzanne Dolezal, who interviewed children about their perceptions of professional wrestling.³⁶

In an interview, reporter Terry Foster said the Free Press covered WrestleMania III primarily because of the record crowd and its Silverdome location.

"It was the largest money maker the Silverdome ever had," he said, "producing more Silverdome revenue than the [National Basketball Association's] Pistons made in its whole forty-one game season."

Foster also said the WWF did not provide adequate background information about its wrestlers. He added that the press' mobility was confined so that the wrestlers' dressing rooms were inaccessible.

"The WWF didn't allow us on the main floor," he said. "We had a reporter working the crowd--she had to buy a ticket from a scalper. And our

photographer wasn't told in advance that he had to stay on a platform two floors above the ring."³⁷

Despite the distance from the ring, the Free Press' post-event coverage on March 30 included close-up color photographs of the action taken by staff photographers Richard Lee and Pauline Lubens. The Free Press' WrestleMania III wrap-up consisted of a front-page story, four feature stories in the "way we live" section and a photo story in its "sports bonus" section. The stories included a staff report with the number "93,173" in a 90-point boldface headline, a description of the matches by Terry Foster and a feature column by Free Press writer Nickie McWhirter.

"Sight gags were played for all their worth," McWhirter said. "Costumes and trappings were outrageous. The play was melodrama, not comedy, however."³⁸

In contrast to the Free Press, which chose to run its coverage in its entertainment pages, The Detroit News ran its WrestleMania III stories in its sports section.

In taking more of a spot news approach, the News began its major coverage of WrestleMania III on March 27. Staff writer Ann Sweeney wrote about a wrestler who was scheduled to perform in a preliminary match. She also reported that the 88,000 tickets already sold had surpassed the old record established at the 1981 Rolling Stones' New Orleans concert.³⁹

On March 29, the day of the event, the News published an insert headlined "the facts," giving the time, place, ticket information and a complete list of the day's matches. Staff writer Paul F. Harris also provided a story about the Hart Foundation--a two-member "tag team" that was scheduled in one of the matches leading to the main event.⁴⁰ Another staff

writer, Justice B. Hill, wrote a story headlined "Hulk's a hit with kids" that described the WWF champion's appeal to younger fans. The story was based on a WWF show that had taken place at the Ohio Center in Columbus, Ohio, on March 11. In his Hogan story, Hill expressed frustration similar to what was written by Neal Rubin of the Free Press. Although he used quotations obtained from the WWF's press conference, Hill desired more in-depth information. But such interviews were not permitted:

The WWF won't permit anybody to unmask its brightest star, to see what's inside the man -- one on one, face to face. The WWF choreographs the shows, handing out press releases and glossy photographs. It decides where or when he will wrestle.⁴¹
It reduces Hulk Hogan to a snapshot.

On the following day, the News published Hill's recap of WrestleMania III, including an error stating that Roddy Piper had lost his preliminary match. Hill wrote, "The performances were electric, as charged with lightning as the promoter had billed them: 'Bigger, Badder, Better.' And they were." He compared the festive WrestleMania atmosphere to that of a "carnival" and stated that the audience had been "thoroughly entertained."⁴²

When interviewed for this paper, Hill said the WWF was "wonderful" in assisting the press: "But in a different way from the NBA or the [major league baseball] Tigers; this was sports entertainment." He added that the sports department covered WrestleMania III because nobody else at the News wanted to do it.

"We [in Detroit] were having twenty thousand coming to the Joe Louis arena for professional wrestling," Hill said. "Somebody is going to those events. There's a readership out there. If we don't run the results, people call us."⁴³

In addition to Hill's recap, the March 30 issue of the News had two

other stories about WrestleMania III and photographs by staff photographer David C. Coates. A feature consisting of notes by staff writer Harris included quotations from celebrities Bob Uecker and Mary Hart.⁴⁴ Also, staff writers Earle Eldridge and Jim Tittsworth had a color story consisting of interviews with people from all over the country who paid up to \$100 a ticket. A typical quotation was attributed to a fan from Connecticut who said, "Reality is a bore. These guys are just terrific athletes and they put on a great show."⁴⁵

The News closed its WrestleMania III coverage with a story on March 31 by staff writer Robert E. Roach. The story, "Wrestlemania's fans leave 'world's biggest mess'" related that more than 1,100 work hours were needed to clean up after the fans left the Silverdome.⁴⁶

Coverage in Other Newspapers

Other nationally prominent newspapers that covered WrestleMania III included The New York Times, the Chicago Sun-Times and USA Today. Nearby coverage appeared in newspapers including the Oakland Press, the Ypsilanti Press, Crain's Detroit Business and the Windsor Star. The event also received belated publicity in the New York Post and The Wall Street Journal.

The New York Times had a four-paragraph notice on March 26 to inform that seats for WrestleMania III at Madison Square Garden's Felt Forum theater were sold out. The Times described the card as a "tribute to mayhem that serves as pro wrestling's Super Bowl." The main event was sarcastically described as Hogan's 150th title defense since WrestleMania II. It also identified Andre as a seven-foot five-inch giant who had never been beaten in a fifteen-year career. This was an occasion when the Times

apparently did not bother to check all of its facts or print "all the news."

Compelled to justify devoting the space to the subject of professional wrestling, The New York Times included a quotation from WWF media coordinator Weber that gave meaning to wrestling's widespread appeal: "Toddler's respond to easily identifiable characters, adult women are attracted by the flashy robes and muscled hulks underneath, and adult men appreciate the athleticism of a 275-pounder's back flip, even one executed in pursuit of a seemingly obvious dive."⁴⁷

In Chicago, the Sun-Times ran a two-page feature by entertainment editor Lon Grahne in its March 27 "WeekendPlus" section. In his story, Grahne quoted Hogan from an interview between the WWF champion and the Sun-Times. He also disclosed that Andre had won a previous encounter with Hogan in 1979.⁴⁸

After the event, USA Today picked up a recap story by Detroit News' reporter Justice Hill over the Gannett wire. The feature was run on March 30 as the lead story of the "People" column in the paper's "Life" section.⁴⁹

On the local level, WrestleMania III was covered by the Oakland Press, which is the city of Pontiac's home town newspaper. The Oakland Press services the more than one million residents of Oakland County with a daily circulation of more than 71,000.⁵⁰ Sports reporter Tom Kowalski and photographer Doug Bauman covered WrestleMania III as a relatively straight sports event, though Kowalski later said the newspaper "had fun with it" and did not take the event very seriously.⁵¹

"If we wanted to expose it for the ridiculous garbage that it is," he said, "we could've done that. But we didn't want to rain on their parade. We didn't compromise our beliefs or anything. We went along with it because

we didn't want to spoil their fun."

Kowalski explained that the Oakland Press ran its coverage in the sports section only because it was off-season for the Detroit Lions football team and he happened to be available for the assignment. The Oakland Press began publishing a pro wrestling column in its Sunday editions and included feature stories as WrestleMania III drew nearer. Kowalski said the pro wrestling stories were buried in the back of the sports section to separate them from the coverage of "legitimate" sports.

"I had more reaction from that stuff than anything I'd ever written," he said, referring to the response his pro wrestling stories elicited from readers.

Although other reporters mingled in the crowd, Kowalski said he felt the WWF tried to restrict the journalists to whom press credentials were issued. "They did everything for you," he said. "All the writers had to sit in the press box and the photographers were not allowed get close to the ring. They brought up quote sheets and made it clear to us at the beginning that there wouldn't be any post-match interviews."⁵²

Another suburban newspaper, the Ypsilanti Press, also covered WrestleMania III, including a summary of the event on March 30.⁵³ Entertainment editor Paul Beaudry's story described the merriment among those in the press box, adding that WrestleMania III changed his "elitist" attitude toward pro wrestling and made him a fan. He concluded the "secret" of wrestling is "not whether you win or lose, but how much fun everyone has playing the game." Ypsilanti Press photographer Paul Hurschmann supplied the accompanying photo for the story.⁵⁴

In Crain's Detroit Business, a local weekly, Wrestlemania III was

covered in its March 23 issue.⁵⁵ Reporter Bradford Wernle wrote a full-page story on what the event would mean to Detroit's business community. The story was accompanied by a photograph of Hulk Hogan that Glenn Triest had taken at Detroit's Joe Louis Arena the preceding February. Wernle wrote that metropolitan Detroit anticipated WrestleMania III would make concession, motel and restaurant business "bulge like the Hulkster's biceps."⁵⁶

Across the Detroit River, the Windsor Star heralded the event on March 28 with one of its characteristic, three-and-a-half inch banner headlines.⁵⁷ The word "WRESTLEMANIA" blazed across the front page of its sports section.

To the left of Hulk Hogan's photograph, Star columnist Alan Halberstadt quoted from an interview with local wrestling promoter and WWF competitor George Cannon. "Andre is not the man he was ten years ago. . . . This might send him off the deep end," Cannon said.⁵⁸ In a second article on the same page, Halberstadt stated that he preferred heel wrestlers and hoped Andre would win. But he predicted "Vince McMahon, WWF owner, would never let the milk-drinker Hogan, his main meal ticket, relinquish the heavyweight crown."⁵⁹ After the event, on March 30, the Star ran a recap with no byline saying that "some matches bordered on the absurd, others went far beyond it." The rest of the story consisted of an interview with a spectator from Windsor.⁶⁰

The most opinionated report in the Star, however, was a column written by general assignment reporter Lisa Priest. "Andre the Giant, definitely the ugliest man to ever exist, foams at the mouth, yells out animal screams--but never speaks to the audience that cheers him on," she wrote.⁶¹

Priest, who subsequently was employed by the Winnipeg Free Press, wrote

a column that was derogatory. She said, however, that the column was not meant to be taken seriously:

My city editor told me to go down there and do a color piece. There were many volunteers for the assignment. Everybody wanted to cover it.

I didn't know anything about professional wrestling, though I'd watched it on television a couple of times before.

About five minutes after every match, there would be a [WWF] person handing out quotes from the winner. They must have been written before the matches.

I wrote a tongue-in-cheek piece. It was a lot of fun. I had a lot of fun.⁶²

Outside the Detroit area, the April 1 issue of the New York Post had a four-column story by Eileen Daspin that told of the 25,000 New Yorkers at Madison Square Garden plus thousands more at several other venues throughout the metropolitan area who paid fifteen to twenty dollars to see the closed-circuit telecast. She wrote that there were few wrestling moves that didn't evoke cheers "louder than Madison Square Garden has heard since the [pro basketball] Knicks won the world championship in 1973. . . . Without a doubt, the main event was when Hulk Hogan dwarfed Andre the Giant, his former mentor and pal."⁶³

Even the usually stolid Wall Street Journal gave WrestleMania III its due. On April 10, financial editor Rich Holden proclaimed that "Middle America finally had its Woodstock" in WrestleMania III. Holden wrote a twenty-one column inch story, culminating in the match between the Hulk and the "undefeated" Andre the Giant.

Holden's description of the shorter than twelve-minute match suggested that he either owned a defective wristwatch or he took literary license in his telling of the bout: "Grown men clutched miniature, lifelike Hulk Hogan dolls and winced as the Hulkster took an initial drubbing. Some 20

agonizing minutes later, Hogan rallied from the grip of Giant's firm bear hug, raising his right fist as if to gather strength from the gods."⁶⁴

In an interview, Holden explained that although the Journal's leisure and arts pages are "totally distinct" from the rest of the newspaper, they occasionally accept stories from writers who normally work on the news side. He said leisure and art editor Ray Sokolov desires a hodgepodge of very eclectic material and encourages writers to produce offbeat stories.

"I happened to be in Detroit and I wrote it on spec," he said. "Professional wrestling is something I've always found very amusing. I missed WrestleMania I and II, but given there were some 90,000 tickets available [for WrestleMania III], we went there. It wasn't exactly in my normal course of duties at the newspaper." Holden added that he'd already bought his ticket for WrestleMania IV.⁶⁵

The Wrestling Press

The wrestling press can be divided into two main categories: newsstand fan magazines and serious fan newsletters. The magazines and newsletters cater to widely varying audiences and are different in their approaches to covering pro wrestling.

The magazines are aimed at youthful readers who desire to know more about pro wrestling than can be learned from watching television and attending the matches. The magazines present wrestling as if the personas were real, and wrestling's status as a true sport is not only unchallenged but resolutely defended. What inside information is disclosed consists of largely fictionalized biographies and behind-the-scenes gossip that further develops the scenarios created by the promoters. In this way, the newsstand

magazines are an extension of the pro wrestling game itself. Full color pin-ups and sensational, sometimes fabricated, copy serve to reinforce the images desired by the wrestling promotions. An occasional editorial will criticize a promotion for using an obviously contrived or tasteless gimmick, thereby providing illusory evidence of the publications' journalistic integrity while indirectly affirming pro wrestling's overall legitimacy. Among the best-selling magazines are the WWF Magazine, Pro Wrestling Illustrated, The Wrestler, Wrestling World and Wrestling Eye.⁶⁶ The WWF Magazine is essentially a public relations and advertising vehicle that serves as a print version of the WWF's television shows. It seldom, if ever, acknowledges the existence of other promotions. The other magazines, responding to their competitive status with the WWF Magazine, tend to depreciate the WWF in comparison with other promotions yet appropriate popular WWF characters such as Hogan for their covers, feature stories and advertisements.⁶⁷ Of these magazines, Pro Wrestling Illustrated and its group of affiliated publications maintain high standards of writing, copy editing and photography.⁶⁸ The other magazines vary in quality and many appear to publish unedited material submitted by young, free-lance writers who are pro wrestling fans.

The newsletters are written for so-called "smart" fans who already know that pro wrestling is a "work," but who view the athletic choreography as an attraction rather than a liability. These publications are a hybrid of fan magazines and trade journals. Although widely resented by promoters who desire to keep their secrets from reaching the public, the newsletters are read by all the promotions because they are the only reliable sources of accurate information in the industry. They offer no colorful photography or

quotations from wrestlers who speak in character, but provide news such as the whereabouts and changing personas of wrestlers throughout the world. Regional reports and results of matches are presented in great detail, including lengthy descriptions of promotional gimmicks and the technical moves used during the matches. Much of the coverage is of events in Japan and other foreign countries. Attendance figures, box office receipts and television ratings are reported and discussed with the seriousness of a typical trade journal.

The newsletter publications are distributed exclusively by mail, and their editorials constantly remind readers to observe the ethic of not disclosing the contents to uninformed fans who enjoy the illusions of pro wrestling. Readers are encouraged to respect the secrecy of the business, regardless of the fact that such a policy certainly curtails the possibility of increasing their circulations. Among the most widely read newsletters at the time of WrestleMania III were the weekly Wrestling Observer Newsletter, the semimonthly Wrestling Forum and the monthly Mat Results, Pro Wrestling Digest and The Wrestling Informer.⁶⁹

In anticipation of WrestleMania III, the newsstand magazines published feature stories about Hogan and Andre. The April issue of WWF Magazine had a cover story about the Hulk-Andre feud that led to WrestleMania III's main event.⁷⁰ Pro Wrestling Illustrated ran a similar cover story, but it detracted from the match's historical significance by pointing out that the pair had wrestled each other before. The Pro Wrestling Illustrated story explained how Andre had met and defeated Hogan during the undercard at New York's Shea Stadium before an audience of 40,995 on August 9, 1980.⁷¹

Essentially, such newsstand magazines advocate full disclosure of the

facts already in the public domain while at the same time protecting the illusory part of the business.

In an interview, Pro Wrestling Illustrated managing editor Bill Apter said, "We are a news magazine. We cover pro wrestling as a sport." Apter also noted that his magazines covered WrestleMania III by using their staff of specialist wrestling reporters who did not depend on WWF support.⁷²

The "news" approach taken by Pro Wrestling Illustrated was typical of all the magazines. Without exception, they reported WrestleMania III as legitimate sport and acclaimed the match between Hogan and Andre an historic event.

Accordingly, the newsletters concurred in their opinion that WrestleMania III was an important milestone in the business, but they were viewing the event from an altogether different perspective. They also agreed that the main event held little promise as a wrestling match.

An interview with Wrestling Observer Newsletter publisher and editor Meltzer revealed that he believed the booking of Hogan versus Andre was "a joke." He explained, "Andre's not a wrestler as far as I'm concerned. He's a freak they call on to sell tickets at their shows."⁷³ In its WrestleMania III coverage, Wrestling Observer Newsletter published listings of the wrestlers, reported business statistics and provided editorial commentary.

In another newsletter, the March 15 issue of Wrestling Forum included a story by publisher-editor Jon Gallagher questioning Andre's ability to perform:

Some disturbing news in from my WWF source. It seems we newsletter editors are not the only ones concerned about Andre's health in his upcoming match with Hogan. An unidentified source within the Titan offices confided that they are worried that he might not make it through the afternoon. They are in fact

concerned for his life! I understand that in the Saturday Night's Main Event that aired 3-14, the battle royal was supposed to have come down to Hogan and Andre but they switched it at the last minute because Andre wasn't feeling too good. In the dressing room, he had very labored breathing once he got back from being eliminated early. Let's pray that something doesn't happen. . . . If Andre would die in the ring, it would⁷⁴ basically destroy both the WWF and [pro] wrestling in general.

The use of unattributed sources is common in the newsletters because sources who leak information could be fired by the promoters. This situation, however, tends to diminish the credibility of certain reports. Gallagher did offer his prediction of the outcome based on fact rather than rumor:

Andre has not worked a match (other than the battle royal in Detroit) in seven months! Seven months! He looks like he is going to blow up [become excessively tired] just signing his name. If he wins, that means that he is going to have to defend the title sometime. In other words, work⁷⁵ another match . . . I look for a clean pin by Hogan in this one.

In its March 30 issue, Wrestling Forum published what might have been the most technically detailed of all the reports on WrestleMania III's main event:

Surprisingly, the match went a total of eleven minutes and 53 seconds (no kidding) . . . they didn't touch each other for the first 39 seconds, then it was only shoves. Hogan attempted a body slam at :52, but couldn't get Andre up and that was the first two count as Andre landed on top. Andre had a little trouble getting up after going down then. At one point early, Hogan gained an advantage by slamming Andre's head into the turn buckle 10 times. At 6:10, Andre caught Hogan in a bearhug that went 2:43. This was probably the only thing that saved poor Andre. . . . At 9:40, Hogan took a bump, landing outside the ring (completely unexpected). Andre followed and they fought outside the ring for the next 1:21. Hogan removed one of the mats covering the floor outside and attempted a piledriver, but Andre backdropped him instead. They came back in the ring at 11:01. At 11:39, Hogan picked Andre up, body slammed him, leg dropped him and Andre did his first job,⁷⁶ [performed his first losing match] in the United States at 11:53.

An essay by Ira K. Friedberg in Mat Results summed up the newsletters'

general attitude toward WrestleMania III:

The moral of the story is that fans are more inclined to pay tickets to see wrestlers who give the impression of being able to wrestle rather than wrestlers who really can work. The WWF has used this approach for years. . . . Through good interviews, public appearances, and fresh angles, they have been able to draw large crowds. .77 . This is the power of Vince McMahon at work. It's amazing."

Indeed, the press everywhere seemed amazed that the pro wrestling card called WrestleMania III could attract 93,173 customers. More so than the main event on the card, the record-breaking attendance figure was what made WrestleMania III a spectacular event.

Discussion

Professional wrestling exists as athletic entertainment where the athletes assume theatrical personas to add the dimension of melodrama. WrestleMania III drew a record audience of 93,173 in part because of the WWF succeeded in developing the appeal of an encounter between fan favorite Hulk Hogan and heel Andre the Giant for the WWF world title.

The WWF promoted the event through its own channels--primarily television--bypassing the press as a means of stimulating the public's desire to attend the matches.

The Detroit Free Press and The Detroit News gave WrestleMania III enthusiastic coverage despite complaints about the barriers created by the promoter. Coverage outside Detroit was moderate and often written in a condescending manner.

The Detroit News, Windsor Star and Oakland Press gave WrestleMania III generous coverage on its sports pages, though their reporters viewed the event more as entertainment. Most of the other newspapers restricted their

coverage to feature stories on their entertainment pages. A few columns were written, but by reporters rather than regular columnists. Several stories sought to justify giving space to pro wrestling by providing readers with explanations of why people patronized the matches.

The most important aspect of the pro wrestling coverage was its quality, not the amount of space it received. Many reporters seemed to approach their assignments with misgivings, but almost every one admitted to having fun. The WrestleMania III stories in the Detroit newspapers addressed a local spectacle, an event with economic impact and a gigantic party. The press outside of Detroit gave the event serious coverage from a business standpoint in addition to frivolous coverage about the matches. The pro wrestling press would have given the event serious coverage even without the large crowd. The magazines were totally serious and devoted its coverage to discussions about the activity inside the ring. The newsletter stories were serious about the business side and Andre's health, yet amusing concerning the matches.

Few of the reporters who covered WrestleMania III had an intimate knowledge of the pro wrestling business. Both Neal Rubin of the Detroit Free Press and Justice Hill of The Detroit News expressed frustration with the WWF's insistence on keeping its star performers away from the press. Those reporters who might have benefited from consulting the newsletters usually were not aware of their existence. The newsletters' practice of discouraging readers from revealing its confidential information to outsiders kept these publications virtually unseen by the newspaper journalists.

Accuracy did not appear to be an important value among the reporters

who covered WrestleMania III. The WWF obscured the facts to some degree and most journalists were content to go along. In many cases, the event was not taken seriously enough to merit the usual fact checking. The obligation to inform readers of the whole truth was not seen as a matter of ethical necessity. In fact, one reporter stated the most ethical procedure was to maintain the illusions rather than "spoil their fun."

These attitudes will undoubtedly be modified if pro wrestling continues to grow in popularity. If pro wrestling continues to attract substantial audiences, more newspapers will begin to cover it. As a greater number of journalist cover pro wrestling, initial resistance and unfamiliarity will diminish. This should result in an increasing appreciation for the wrestlers' athletic skills and less emphasis on their ring personalities. Also, pro wrestling coverage might expand beyond the occasional special events and become a regular feature in many newspapers.

On the other hand, if pro wrestling's popularity peaked with WrestleMania III, these things will not come to pass. Pro wrestling will once again recede into the background and seldom appear in the pages of most newspapers.

NOTES

¹ The \$16 million is a conservative estimate. David Meltzer reported the event grossed a \$1.6 million live gate at the Pontiac Silverdome, \$5.2 million from 166 closed-circuit arenas and \$10.3 million from pay-per-view television revenues, in "Pro Wrestling's Biggest Gross Gates of 1987," Best of the Wrestling Observer 1983-1987, p. 12.

² The World Wrestling Federation subsequently testified that its matches were choreographed. See Peter Kerr, "Now It Can Be Told: Those Pro Wrestlers Are Just Having Fun," The New York Times, Feb. 10, 1989, pp. 1, B2. The WWF was petitioning to have pro wrestling removed from the jurisdiction of New Jersey's State Athletic Commission, which takes a dollar for each ticket sold at regulated events. The WWF stood to lose \$600,000 to the commission when WrestleMania V occurred in Atlantic City, according to Jon Gallagher, "The Dreaded State Athletic Commission," Wrestling Forum, March 15, 1989, pp.12-12.

³ The Japanese tendency to consider pro wrestling a sport was supported by the International Olympic Committee when it ruled Yoshiaki Yatsu ineligible for the 1988 games. Yatsu, a prominent professional wrestler, won the Japanese freestyle championship in 1986 after a six-year absence from amateur wrestling. For further details, see David Meltzer, Wrestling Observer Newsletter, Jan. 16, 1989, p. 2.

⁴ Following publication of The New York Times story about the WWF disclosures in the New Jersey case, a wrestling newsletter conducted a poll that asked, "Should pro wrestling be considered a sport?" The respondents unanimously said yes. See "The Wrestling Pollster," Pro Wrestling Torch, March 9, 1989.

⁵ Roland Barthes, "The World of Wrestling," Mythologies (New York: Noonday, 1972), pp. 15-25.

⁶ Arthur Asa Berger, "The Politics of Wrestling," Pop Culture (Dayton, Ohio: PFLaum/Standard, 1973), pp. 54-58.

⁷ Brendan Maguire and John F. Wozniak, "Racial and Ethnic Stereotypes in Professional Wrestling," The Social Science Journal, 24 (no. 3, 1987): pp. 261-273.

⁸ For a glossary of pro wrestling terms, see Jerome Matthews, "Rasslin' Jargon," Wrestling Eye, Feb. 1987, pp. 26-29 and Jon Gallagher, "Speaking the Language," Wrestling Forum, Feb. 15, 1988, pp. 13-14.

⁹ Michael Frezell telephone interview, Feb. 15, 1988

¹⁰ Alan Halberstadt telephone interview, Feb. 15, 1988.

¹¹ J. D. McKay, "Editorial," Pro Wrestling Digest, Oct. 1987, p. 3.

- ¹² Terry Todd, "To the Giant Among Us," Sports Illustrated, Dec. 21, 1981, p. 82.
- ¹³ The match between Ricky Steamboat and Randy Savage was awarded top honors in "Year End Awards," Wrestling Forum, Jan. 15, 1988, p. 12; "Achievement '87," Pro Wrestling Illustrated, March 1988, p. 51; and Best of the Wrestling Observer 1983-1987, p. 80. The Observer poll also named the Hogan-Andre match "worst match of the year," p. 87.
- ¹⁴ Michael Weber telephone interview, Jan. 13, 1988.
- ¹⁵ David Meltzer telephone interview, Feb. 16, 1988.
- ¹⁶ Jeff Steele, Untitled, Pro Wrestling Digest, Dec. 1988, p. 20.
- ¹⁷ David Meltzer, The Wrestling Observer's Who's Who in Pro Wrestling (Campbell, Cal: Wrestling Observer Newsletter, 1986) p. 55.
- ¹⁸ WWF press release, "WWF Superstars to Clash in Main Event of WrestleMania III," Feb. 16, 1987.
- ¹⁹ Meltzer, Who's Who, pp. 55-57.
- ²⁰ "Photos of a Lifetime! Hulk Hogan: From the Cradle to the Throne," Pro Wrestling Illustrated, January, 1986, pp. 30-34.
- ²¹ Meltzer, Who's Who, p. 56.
- ²² "1987 Wrestling Observer Ratings, Best of the Wrestling Observer 1983-1987, p. 62 and "1986 Wrestling Observer Ratings," Wrestling Observer 1986 Yearbook, p. 24.
- ²³ WWF press release, "WWF Superstars to Clash." The WrestleMania III press notes, however, list Andre as seven-feet five-inches tall.
- ²⁴ Meltzer, Who's Who, p. 16.
- ²⁵ Terry Todd, p. 89.
- ²⁶ Gerald W. Morton and George M. O'Brien, Wrestling to Rasslin': Ancient Sport to American Spectacle (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1985), p. 139.
- ²⁷ All population figures cited in this paper are from the U. S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1980 Census of Population (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1982). Newspaper circulation figures are from Gale Directory of Publications, Vol. 1: Catalog of Publications (Detroit, Mich.: Gale Research Co., 1988). The Detroit News, circulation 639,720 daily, 724,342 Sunday and 575,093 Saturday. The Detroit News, circulation 678,399 daily, 839,319 Sunday and 637,804 Saturday.

- 28 Neal Rubin, "Wrestlemaniacs ready to wrangle," Detroit Free Press, March 4, 1987, p. 3A.
- 29 Terry Foster, "Rowdy Roddy," Detroit Free Press, March 17, 1987, p. 1B.
- 30 Neal Rubin, "Countdown to WrestleMania III: Bloody brawls require co-operation and tricks," Detroit Free Press, March 24, 1987, p.1C.
- 31 _____, "Meet the human inside the Hulk," Detroit Free Press, March 25, 1987, p. 1B.
- 32 Eric Kinkopf, "Fans, critics talk of the fall of Jim Bakker," p. 1B.
- 33 Meltzer interview.
- 34 Dawson Bell, "Testing 1-2-3, Wrestlemania will help Pontiac prepare for pope." Detroit Free Press, March 26, 1987, p. 1.
- 35 Terry Foster, "WrestleMania III," Detroit Free Press, March 27, 1987, pp. 1C, 4C.
- 36 Suzanne Dolezal, "Countdown to WrestleMania III: Today's the big day, and kids are ready," Detroit Free Press, March 29, 1987, pp. 1K, 4K.
- 37 Terry Foster telephone interview, Feb. 25, 1988.
- 38 Nickie McWhirter, "It's as real as Batman and Robin," Detroit Free Press, March 30, 1987, p. 1C.
- 39 Ann Sweeney, "It's given Hillbilly Jim a a stronghold against wrestling's villains," The Detroit News, March 27, 1987, pp. 1D, 10D.
- 40 Paul F. Harris, "A Hart to Hart Matter," The Detroit News, March 29, 1987, p. C19.
- 41 Justice B. Hill, "Hulk's a hit with kids," The Detroit News, March 29, 1987.
- 42 _____, "As usual, Hogan steals the show," The Detroit News, March 30, 1987, pp. 1F, 7F.
- 43 _____. telephone interview, Feb. 25, 1988.
- 44 Paul F. Harris, "the show: notebook," The Detroit News, March 30, 1988, p. 7F.
- 45 Earle Eldridge and Jim Tittsworth, "Grunts, groans pack Dome," The Detroit News, March 30, 1987, pp. 1A, 8A.
- 46 Robert E. Roach, "Wrestlemania fans leave 'world's biggest mess.' The

Detroit News, March 31, 1987, p. B3.

⁴⁷ "A Main Event: Manic Sunday," The New York Times, March 26, 1987.

⁴⁸ Lon Grahnke, "A fan's guide to WrestleMania III on Closed Circuit and Pay-Per-View TV," Chicago Sun-Times, March 27, 1987.

⁴⁹ Justice Hill, "Victory is sweet for mighty Hulk," USA Today, March 30, 1987.

⁵⁰ Oakland County's actual population was listed as 1,011,793. The city of Pontiac's population was 76,715. The Oakland Press had a circulation of 71,227 daily, 79,034 Sunday and 70,361 Saturday.

⁵¹ Kowalski's recap stories concentrated on the preliminary matches rather than the Hulk-Andre main event. See "'The Dragon' gains his revenge" and "Rowdy Roddy prevails," Oakland Press, March 30, 1987.

⁵² Tom Kowalski telephone interview, Feb. 24, 1988.

⁵³ Ypsilanti's population 24,031. The Ypsilanti Press is published daily, Saturday and Sunday. Its circulation is listed in Gale as 15,832.

⁵⁴ Paul Beaudry, "A wrestling fan's regret," Ypsilanti Press, March 31, 1987.

⁵⁵ Crain's Detroit Business weekly circulation is 31,429.

⁵⁶ Bradford Wernle, "Wrestlers stir mania, megabucks," Crain's Detroit Business, March 23-29, 1987.

⁵⁷ Windsor, Ontario, has a population of 192,083. The Windsor Star is published Monday through Saturday with a circulation of 86,262.

⁵⁸ Alan Halberstadt, "Cannon levels blast at WWF," Windsor Star, March 28, 1987, p. B1

⁵⁹ _____, "Not much hope for the bad guys," Windsor Star, March 28, 1987, p. B1

⁶⁰ "They hankered for the Hulk," Windsor Star, March 30, 1987, p. A2.

⁶¹ Lisa Priest, "Crowd wallows in Hulkamania," Windsor Star, pp. A1, A4.

⁶² _____, telephone interview, Feb. 22, 1988.

⁶³ Eileen Daspin, "Wrestlemaniacs III," New York Post, April 1, 1987.

⁶⁴ Rich Holden, "Maniacs Throng and Howl," Wall Street Journal, April 10, 1987.

65 _____, telephone interview, Feb. 25, 1988.

66 The WWF Magazine has 212,890 subscribers, according to an Audit Bureau of Circulations report in the June 30, 1987, issue of Folio. Comparisons with other newsstand publications are not possible because many widely distributed magazines, including Pro Wrestling Illustrated, do not publish their circulation figures.

67 Wrestling Eye magazine has consistently denigrated Hulk Hogan and the WWF. Yet, of its sixteen issues published between its first issue in November 1985 and its March 1987 issue, no fewer than six issues have featured Hulk Hogan on the cover.

68 The publisher of Pro Wrestling Illustrated is also responsible for The Wrestler, Inside Wrestling, Wrestling '88 and other pro wrestling newsstand magazines.

69 Wrestling Observer Newsletter, which has nearly 2,000 subscribers according to David Meltzer, probably is the largest circulating of the newsletters. Their addresses are as follows: Wrestling Observer Newsletter, P. O. Box 1228, Campbell, CA 95009-1228; Wrestling Forum, Box 65, Knoxville, IL 61448; Pro Wrestling Torch, P. O. Box 201844, Minneapolis, MN 55420; and Pro Wrestling Digest, now called Ringside Reflector, Rt. 5 Box 66, Louisville, MS 39339. Mat Results ceased publication in 1987 and The Wrestling Informer ceased publication in 1988.

70 "Hulk vs. Andre: 'Three Years is a Long Time,'" WWF Magazine, April/May 1987, pp. 20-25.

71 "Hulk vs. Andre? The WWF Braces for All-Out War!" Pro Wrestling Illustrated, May 1987, pp. 26-28.

72 Bill Apter telephone interview, Feb. 26, 1988.

73 Meltzer interview.

74 Jon Gallagher, "World Wrestling Federation," Wrestling Forum, March 15, 1987, p. 19.

75 Ibid., p. 18.

76 Jon Gallagher, "World Wrestling Federation," Wrestling Forum, March 30, 1987, p. 16.

77 Ira K. Friedberg, "Or Could Crockett Make It In New York?" Mat Results, Vol. 5 No. 5, March 1987, p. 5.